Course Description:

The plan of this course is to read three very different political theorists - Machiavelli, Marx, and Foucault - to think about what “politics” is, and about what it means to “theorize” about such an object. So our goal is two-fold: to think about politics, and about theorizing this object.

On the one hand, we analyze what politics - as a concept and a practice - has meant in history, means to us now, and could mean. What distinguishes “politics” from other kinds of human activities? What makes an action or practice “political?” Is it credible to define a conceptual “idea” of “the political” that tells us what politics essentially/always is, in contrast to, say, morality or art as having their own distinctive essence? Or on the contrary, is politics (and so our sense of what is “political”) a changing human practice?

On the other hand, by reading Machiavelli, Marx, and Foucault we also explore different “dimensions” of political life: ideas of “rule” and of “the state;” other structures of domination (class, race, gender) that have been politicized; the forging of group identifications (by class, nation, gender, race, disability, etc); the role of antagonism between different groupings; the role of “culture” in the form of narratives, symbols, and language more broadly; the role of rhetoric and performance, since politics happens through speech acts meant to persuade audiences; the aspect of appearance and theatricality, since politics is enacted on a public stage; and lastly, the changing ideas and practices of “democracy.”

By comparing different thinkers, however, we also explore what it means to “theorize” about politics. Is “political theory” a changing practice? If political theorists use different literary genres and metaphors to represent the world, what difference do these forms make to the “content” of their views? How theorists write, we will see, shapes what they can say.

Learning Goals:

* close reading of texts
* writing critical essays that use textual evidence to address themes
* speaking in collaborative and conversational ways about contested topics
* beginning to understand “politics” and the canon of political theory
Course Requirements
- attendance is mandatory: we meet only once a week; any unexcused absences will count against your grade
- preparation of assigned texts is presumed
- a 1-page (typed) response to readings each week (questions in syllabus)
- two 5-page essays about course texts (a third essay is optional)
- a final optional project relating course texts to a current event/issue

Grading:
- response papers 25%
- participation 25%
- essays 25% x 2 = 50% (improvement in writing also counts)

* plagiarism - using content you do not attribute to its actual source - is punished by an F in the course. If you have ANY questions about what counts as plagiarism (i.e. what resources, passages, or work you should cite) please ask for clarification!

* Policy on electronics: I expect all cell-phones to be turned off and put out of sight and reach. Laptop use is not allowed unless the student has learning difficulties that require it.

* We will take a break half-way through class for 10 minutes.

Required Texts
Niccolo Machiavelli, The Prince and the Discourses (Modern Library ed. only)
Robert Tucker, ed, The Marx-Engels Reader 2nd (red) edition only, Norton
Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, Volume One (Vintage)
James Baldwin, The Fire Next Time
xeroxed packet of readings provided by instructor
Sep. 3: Introduction: defining “politics” and “political”

Sep 10: Machiavelli I: Spatial and Temporal dimensions of Politics

read: *Niccolo Machiavelli, The Discourses
  Machiavelli’s preface/introduction
  Book One: preface, chaps 1-7/9-12/16-18/25-26/34-35
  40/47/53/55/58
  Book Two: preface/ chaps 2/10/19/24/29
  Book Three: chaps 1-3/7-9/30-31/35/41-42

write: * For M, what characterizes a “republic” or makes a “free people”?

Sep 17: Machiavelli II:

read: *Sheldon Wolin, “Norm and Form: Constitutionalizing Democracy”
  *John McMcCormick, “Ferocious Populism”
  *Abraham Lincoln, “Lyceum Address”
  *Henry Thoreau, “Civil Disobedience”
  *Staughton Lynd, “Coalition Politics or Non-Violent Revolution?”

write: * How do constitutions protect &/or endanger democratic politics?
  * Is appeal to (constitutional) origins necessarily conservative?
  * Is Lynd correct: does the US need a new constitution/convention?

Sep 24: Machiavelli III: Contingency, context, and political action

read: *Machiavelli, The Prince
  *Mary Dietz, “Trapping the Prince”

write: * Why is “Fortuna” the goddess of politics?
  * What kind of character do humans need if the world is ruled by Fortuna, not God? (What character is welcomed by each authority?)
  *When political actors assume “the reality of appearances,” and take account of how they appear/are perceived, are they being corrupt or acting responsibly?
  *If “the prince” is a metaphor for politics, what does it mean?

Oct 1: Machiavelli IV:

read: *Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation”
  *Hannah Arendt, “Reflections On Violence”

write: *Assess Arendt’s distinction between violence and power
  *Analyze violence: is it always wicked, but sometimes necessary —when?
  Is it always wicked AND impractical/counter-productive?

first paper due Friday October 5 by 5pm
### Oct 8: Marx's theory of alienation I: beyond liberalism
#### #6
**read:**
* Robt Darnton, “What Was Revolutionary about the Fr Revolution?”
* Karl Marx, Tucker Reader, “Letter To Ruge” (12-15)
* Marx, Tucker Reader, “Contribution to the Critique” (53-65)
* Marx, Tucker Reader, “On the Jewish Question” (25-55)

**write:**
* Assess Darnton’s view of “revolution”
* For Marx, what does the French Revolution accomplish & mean?
* Assess M’s idea that humans “alienate” power to gods & states
* What is Marx’s critique of “the democratic state” in the US?

### Oct 15: Marx’s Theory of alienation II -from state to society & labor
**class cancelled for Fall Break**
BUT - do the reading and response paper:

**read:**
* Marx, Tucker Reader, “Eco & Philo Manuscript” (70-93/101-105)
* Marx, Tucker Reader, “Alienation and social Class” (133-136)

**write:**
* How does M conceive the dimensions & modes of “alienation”? Do you find it a credible/appealing/useful concept?
* Discuss the anthropology M presumes: what is his idea of “Man” i.e. of the human essence?

### Oct 22: Marx’s historical materialism
#### #7
**read:**
* Marx, Tucker Reader, “Theses on Feuerbach” & “German Ideology” (143-75/189-200)
* Marx, Tucker Reader, Preface & Afterward to Capital (294-302)
* Raymond Williams, Marxism & Literature, “base & superstructure” (xerox)

**write:**
* Why does M reject his anthropology of species being & alienation
* Assess M’s view of culture & politics as a “superstructure” that reflects” a “base” of “material conditions.”
* Assess M’s idea that history is teleological, proceeding in stages toward its “end” (as goal and culmination.)
* Assess M’s claim to a science that discloses the laws of historical development.

### Oct 29: From Marx to Post-Marxism I: from politics as class conflict to hegemony
#### #8
**read:**
* Marx, Tucker Reader, “The Communist Manifesto” (473-500)
* Marx, Tucker Reader, “Political Writings” (501-524)
* Laclau & Mouffe, Hegemony and Socialist Strategy (pages tba)

**write:**
* In what ways does M praise -& require- capitalism? Why?
* Discuss how M imagines/fosters group (class) identification.
* Address M’s view that antagonism is crucial in politics.
* What is “post” Marx? what assumptions do Laclau/Mouffe reject?
* How do L&M make language fundamental not secondary?
* Why do L&M endorse and rely on liberal democracy?
* Describe the idea of “hegemony”

Second paper due Monday November 4 by 10am

### Nov 5: Post-Marxism II: from ideology to “power/knowledge” & “discourse”
#### #9
read:  
* Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History....."  
* Michel Foucault, "Two Lectures on Power"  
* Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power"  
* Michel Foucault, "the Subject and power"  
write:  
* How is "discourse" different than "ideology"?  
* Why depict "the subject," not "the individual" or "the self"  
* How does F define power, and therefore politics? (Compare F to "power")  
* How does F relate "knowledge" to "power"?  
* Has power really changed from the "juridical" to the "disciplinary," or does F reveal a previously ignored dimension?  

Nov 12 Foucault II: sexuality, discourse, and identity politics  
#10  
read:  
* Foucault, History of Sexuality parts three/four  
write:  
* How does Foucault redefine "sexuality" and explain identity?  
* How does F relate the 'deployment' of sexuality, and capitalism?  
* What is the difference between moral/juridical discourses about sexuality and those that define it in terms norms/pathology?  

Nov 19 Foucault III: bio-power and critical theory  
#11  
read:  
* Foucault, History part five  
* Foucault, "What is Enlightenment"  
write:  
* What is "bio-power" and "bio-politics"?  
* How does F conceive the role of theory?  
* What does F's theory help you see/do? What are its limits?  
* How does F redefine politics compared to Machiavelli or Marx?  

Nov 26 (Gender) Politics & Freedom I  
#12  
Read:  
* Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality"  
* Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination"  
write:  
* In what ways is "heterosexuality" a "political institution"?  
* How is gender a performative practice?  
* Characterize the difference between Rich and Butler  

Dec 3 (Gender) Politics and Freedom II  
#13  
read:  
* Hannah Arendt, "What is Freedom?"  
* Linda Zerilli, Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom, introduction  
write:  
* Characterize and assess Arendt's view of freedom  

optional paper due Monday Dec 9 10am  

Dec 10 Race and Rhetoric  
#14  
read:  
* James Baldwin, The Fire Next Time
final papers/optional papers due Friday Dec 13 by noon
politics is noun naming an activity - what activity? Adjectival/adverbial: being “political,” making something “political”

why is politics necessary? Plurality and heterogeneity contingency/uncertainty justice not self-evident community is not automatic temporality/becoming, change — we are never fully present/always divided

How is it valuable? Living with uncertainty/contingency/moral ambiguity/paradox taking others into account risking the self

sites of politics citizen/state/nation Civil society, subject positions, Institutions (family, workplace, gender, economy)

“escaping” from politics through reason or revelation by absolutes, truths, gods, authority, priests, philosophers, experts procedures or forms of rationality violence dreams of consensus, agreement, unity

Dimensions of politics
INTERESTS/rationality
MOTIVES (anxiety/fantasy)
identification
power
legitimacy
rhetoric/persuasion/dialogue
narrative/culture
violence/coercion
performance
Utopia
democracy is

SPATIAL DIMENSIONS
landscape
stage

TEMPORAL DIMENSION
history
narrative

Central Questions:
sovereignty: schmitt
the state
the people
the paradoxes of democratic legitimacy
publics/counter-publics
radical democracy:
Machiavelli
lefort
ranciere
wolin
“The political”
related to
ACTION
THE COMMON
DECISION
FRIEND/ENEMY
RECONSTITUTION
THE EMERGENT
This class pursues a cluster of questions about politics:

I-Mapping the concept:

A. What is “politics?” A specific activity involving “government” and thus state power? Activities engaging collective life and destiny, involving claims to commonality or common interests, as well as large-scale group action? Any exercise of power or any situation involving power? A way of doing (or thinking about) ANY activity regardless of its location or context? What do we mean that someone is “being political?” What does it mean to say that a practice or issue has been “politicized?” What do we mean that there is a ‘politics’ in or of the family, culture, or science?

B. The word “political” - (1) what is going on when we say that virtually everything is “political?” If everything is, is the concept no longer useful? (2) Some theorists try to identify the “properly political,” that is, not so much what people CALL politics (earmarks, pork-barrel bargaining, smoke-filled rooms, electioneering) but what is “really” political - the essence, the real truth, the truly genuine act. (Like we might say with “love” - that is not really love, we might say, but this is...) Theorists try to identify the distinctive about a political as opposed to a moral, erotic, aesthetic, military, literary activity. Something like seeking the “essence,” almost in the sense of a platonic form (what is the “chairness” that enables us to say this is and that is not a “chair”). As you read, keep asking, what distinguishes “the political” from what we CALL “politics.”

C. The history of the practice and of the concept, e.g. from the Greek polis, where “politics” was first identified as a special kind of activity, to the French Revolution, which re-introduced the idea of “the people” ruling themselves, to more recent arguments about class and the workplace, or family, gender, and sexuality, or “identity politics.” Where is “politics” located? Where is this activity taking place? Who is involved in it? (Formally enfranchised citizens voting in elections? Anyone is any sort of institution or association?) So as you read along, ask: how have practices and conceptions of politics Changed

II-Why are so many Americans avowedly hostile to “politics”?

A. The moral dimension: are we hostile to “politics” because of what once was called “sin” -because power and willful partiality are involved? Because there are always winners and losers? Because those who wield power are at risk morally, since actions always turn out differently than we intend, and often have troubling consequences? But on the other hand: Might power be necessary, even valuable -needed to do anything good or worthwhile? And if we seek purity by remaining passive or disengaged, do we still put ourselves at moral risk? How are principles and power related, then? (When is compromise corrupt, and when morally necessary, even noble? When is moral intransigence - immoral?) What are our obligations to others in regard to collective things?

B. The systemic dimension: Are people hostile to or disengaged because of the structure of the political system itself, which encourages individualism and withdrawal? Whose interests are served by our apathy or antipathy? Are we absent or hostile because politics is corrupt, not so much in a “moral” sense as because, systemically, private interests and corporate power rule, politicians are bought, representation is a sham, debate is non-existent, and ordinary people cannot make a difference? TO see or say this “cynicism,” or insight? What follows from it?

III. The fundamental dimensions of “politics”

Why is there politics in human life? Partly because each person is radically incomplete (without self-sufficiency) and it is only by creating communities that we can fulfill and develop ourselves, meet our needs, survive at all let alone flourish. But politics is also necessary because, on the other hand, common interest or justice is not self-evident. We may need each other, but we are PLURAL -we have different ideas of how to live and what is to be done, different views of what constitutes justice. But mutual need, plurality, and disagreement do not suffice to characterize political life.

A. Power - how do human beings generate and exercise power, the capacity to shape the world and themselves? How do we create power? How do we decide the goals or purposes or objects on behalf of which to exercise it? How do we justify power? How do we control (whose) power? The word “power” speaks to the facts of hierarchy and inequality in all human social relations, but it also speaks to human capacities to (re)make history and (re)shape their world. Without power there is no life, no benefit, no culture, but power makes life dangerous, too. (What does democracy mean in regard to power?)

B. Language, Persuasion, and Justice: politics arises because we live in LANGUAGE, and pursue our ends only THROUGH language. We often dismiss language as “unreal” compared to interests and passions we consider really real, but human beings create reality through stories, symbols, which exercise material power in our life. In politics, no end can be achieved without language that generates legitimacy, and no leader, social movement, regime, or nation is able to create power, to become powerful, to achieve its ends, unless it ALSO generates widespread support -through rhetorics that PERSUADE people to assent, by appealing to principles and by offering REAL benefits. But language can deceive and consent can be “manufactured.”
When is language or political speech "corrupt"? (When does political "poetry" - the language of high principle and noble ideals - obscure worldly interests or advance a hidden agenda? When are noble ideals essential to meeting worldly necessities?)

C. Identification: politics appears because human beings are always defining - struggling with each other over definitions of belonging and membership and identity. With whom do I belong? Who is the WE with whom we include ourselves? Am I to "identify" by gender, ethnic/racial origin, class position, national attachment, party affiliation? What difference in my life follows from one or another identification? These identifications are not natural, but "political," that is, created, public, power-laden, exclusionary, and open to change or redefinition. Are some identifications inherently pernicious? Should we work to abolish them? Or is the idea to pluralize them? How should we mediate conflicting identifications that bring people into conflict? Is there some way to opt out and say: I am "just" an individual?

D. Motivation: what "drives" people to act? How do people define their "interests" (and the "self" that has such interests)? Is our understanding of our interest every as rational as we believe it is? How are understandings of interest engendered by culture and media? On the other hand, do we also need to consider unconscious motivations, wishes, fantasies, disclaimed aggression, etc, "drives" working as if were behind our backs, shaping how we define our interest? Are we ever to credit what people say about their motivations? But what then is the relationship between interests and professions of principle? Are we to "unmask" principle to expose the "real" interest motivating action? Is there a relationship? If politics "reflects" interest, anxiety, fantasy, and principles, can it also mean changing how we define/understand these?

E. Public life and Action: Politics arises because human beings must decide what is to be done, and politics appears not only in our deliberation - in language - but in its outcome - the deed, the act - though speaking to others is itself a deed, a kind of action. What difference does it make that people speak and act in public - in meetings, rallies, associations, etc - always in the presence of others? What counts as a public event or deed? What is "action" and what counts as acting? (Why are theatrical metaphors so useful for thinking about politics - and about our antipathy to politicians who are "false" because they are "merely acting")

IV-Democracy:

What is democracy? (Demos - the many - cracy - rule vs. aristoi (the few) cracy - rule or anarchy as non-rule) Is democracy a form of government? A form of political life independent of and in many ways hostile to the state - i.e. as direct participation in social movements, counter-cultures or a parallel polis? Is the only "real" democracy a "direct," that is, personal involvement in governance and the exercise of power? Does representative government warrant the name democracy? Or, does democracy name a culture, a way of life not confined to government or elections? Or is democracy about the private rights of individuals to live (consume, work, worship, raise children) as they wish? Then is democracy not about common or political life at all, but the guarantor of private individualism?

V-Citizenship and Nation-states:

How are we to assess the meaning of nationalism and the power of the nation-state? Has national identification and patriotism ever NOT been pernicious? Should people now identify as trans-national citizens of the world, oriented locally and globally but not nationally? Or is a politics oriented by nations necessary in a globalized world?
I have given you, O Adam, no fixed abode, and no visage of your own, nor any special gift, in order that whatever place or aspect or talents you yourself will have desired, you may have and possess them wholly in accord with your desire and your own decision. Other species are confined to a prescribed nature, under laws of my making. No limits have been imposed upon you, however; you determine your nature by your own free will, in the hands of which I have placed you. I have placed you at the world's very center, that you may better behold from this point whatever is in the world. And I have made you neither celestial nor terrestrial, neither mortal nor immortal, so that, like a free and able sculptor and painter of yourself, you may mold yourself wholly in the form of your choice. ----Pico della Mirandolla

“I have become useless to myself, to my relatives and to my friends because such as been the decision of my sad fate. And I can say nothing better than that there has been left me no other good than health for myself and my family. I continue to wait in order to be in time to take good fortune when she comes, and if she does not come, to have patience.”

"On the coming of evening, I return to my house and enter my study; and at the door I take off the days clothing covered dust and mud, and put on garments regal and courtly, and reclothed appropriately, I enter the ancient courts of ancient men, where, received by them with affection, I feed on that food which only is mine and which I was born for, where I am not ashamed to speak with them and to ask them the reason for their actions; and they in their kindness answer me; and for four hours of time I do not feel boredom, I forget every trouble, I do not dread poverty, I am not frightened by death. entirely I give myself over to them."

"I believe...as Boccaccio said, that it is better to act and repent than not to act and repent." ----Machiavelli

"I love my city more than my soul." ---Machiavelli

"Although martial severity, self-discipline and danger have been the conspicuous characteristics of my life, its primary prerequisite and basis has been freedom, a necessity completely irreconcilable with any kind of commitment to a grossly factual situation. Accordingly, if I lived like a soldier it would have been a silly misapprehension to believe that I should therefore have lived as a soldier; yes, if it is permissible to describe and define intellectually an emotional treasure as noble as freedom, then it may be said that live like a soldier but not as a soldier, figuratively but not literally, to be allowed in short to live symbolically, spells true freedom."  
-Thomas Mann
Study Questions: Machiavelli, The Discourses
- He claims to create a “new route.” What is it???
- He claims to recover the example of the roman republic - why?
- He celebrates the founders of religions and states. Why?
- Romulus killed Remus: if the act accuses, the result excuses - what redeems fratricide? What redeems founding violence?
- He says republics require a religious framework of faith. Why?
- How is a founding law or constitution, and a founding faith, the BASIS of liberty? Does freedom require a framework of law and belief? Why? Or -do founders (“founding fathers”) create an edifice that imprisons their children, the second and third generations? How can they exercise their freedom?
- What is corruption? Machiavelli uses the word all the time, but what does he mean? When is a republic “corrupt?” What has happened to the citizens? Does it denote a moral condition? Psychological? Political?
- The way to address “corruption,” he argues, is a “return to first principles” by which citizens also “return to themselves.” What does “return” mean?
- Use his story of founding, corruption & renewal to theorize American politics

Study Questions, Machiavelli, The Prince:
- There seems to be a profound contradiction between the Prince and the Discourses - the Discourses celebrates Roman virtue, the Prince counsels fraud and force. But are they so different? What is the relationship? Are BOTH teaching important lessons about politics?
- What is Machiavelli’s purpose in The Prince? (Is it to instruct princes -or to warn the people?) What does he mean by describing himself as a landscape painter who sees both heights and valleys? (Where are we?)
- Does it confirm or change your view of what politics is or must be?
- Why must a Prince “learn to be bad?” What does he mean? What does he teach about force (the lion) and fraud (the fox)? Are deception and violence necessary in politics? When? Why? How does fighting “like a man” (by law) relate to fighting like a beast, by force and fraud? Is there a purpose that “redeems” the evil he does? Could fighting like beasts be necessary to establish or protect the laws that enable people to fight like men? Or, are both ways of fighting always necessary?
- He says “I love my city more than my soul.” He loves his city MORE -not rather than- his soul. Does this claim illuminate his text?
- What does it mean that the prince is oriented by Fortuna and not (only?) God? Why is Fortuna the goddess of politics?
- Imagine the prince as a leader - a Moses, Pericles, or Lincoln, Bobby Kennedy, Clinton, Mandela, Bush, Obama: does your view of the text change? Was Martin Luther King a prince?
- Imagine that “princes” must situate themselves in the relationship of “the nobles” and “the people” (of the few who want to dominate and the many who wish not to be ruled)
- Rousseau says that Machiavelli wrote the prince for (to warn) the people
Context for thinking about Machiavelli

1. Remember the time he wrote as a time of such violence and chaos - and what might be justified in THAT context, when such violence makes ANY means seem justified if it creates stability and security.

2. Imagine that he seeks, most of all, to create ANY stable structure, BUT also, ideally, a republic. Actions that seem necessary to FOUND a republic are NOT necessary in a healthy republic, except in moments of crisis. (War, as with Lincoln and southern secession, say, but there remains the issue of deception.) He addresses limit conditions and “states of exception” - times of founding and crisis, more than he addresses “normal” or “healthy” politics.

4. He really believes that single great leaders are necessary for great changes in the world, but as a republican, he also is deeply ambivalent about such leaders. That is why the longest chapter in the prince is the chapter on conspiracy. The founder of the new republic will have to be killed by republican plotters unless he creates republican institutions and steps aside.

5. There is moral ambiguity in Machiavelli, therefore: princes may need to do evil things for good ends, and the people, also, may need to use violence to gain their liberty. This is the meaning of his contrast between “fighting like BEASTS” (like a “lion” and a “fox”) and “fighting like MEN” - The goal is establishing a framework in which people can “fight like men,” i.e. “by law” - within a constitutional framework, even as that framework itself can be changed (as it was in Rome.) Force and Fraud MAY be necessary to establish that framework, but are NOT prevalent once it is established, if the polity is healthy. Think of Mandela and the ANC in South Africa, whose political struggle to (re)found a non-racial state involved lion and fox but enabled another kind of politics afterwards. Still, there remains an inescapable element of the “beastly” even in a healthy polity - as when the people RIOT to gain redress of grievances, or conspire to deceive their enemies. WHEN is force or fraud necessary - and who decides? Or should we reject the very idea of states of exception to normal ‘moral’ rules?

6. Imagine that Machiavelli is trying to teach us ABOUT politics - especially about aspects of politics we find ugly or abhorrent - AND imagine that his lessons are warped by his machismo, which was rife in Florentine culture. His idea of politics is inextricably linked and tainted by his conception of masculinity or manliness, compared to “effeminacy” as corruption.

What is Machiavelli trying to teach about politics?
I. The landscape of power.

You are situated in a landscape of power - princes, people, and nobles. Assume inequality of power between elites and people, also assume that different princes try to organize the people in different ways - Nixon v McGovern in 72 Jesse Jackson v Mondale in 84, or Kerry v Bush in 2004. Imagine the state as the SITE and object of such conflicts - who controls it, uses it, FOR whom. Do the nobles use the state to exploit the people, or do the people use the state to defend themselves against the nobles. Imagine that “the nobles” and “the people” are themselves divided, not a unit automatically, but a political creation, created and sustained by ideas and leaders. No one is OUTSIDE the landscape of power.

What is the landscape of power in the U.S. now?
Where & WHO are YOU? WHO are you WITH?

II. The theatre of appearances:

How you appear to others is a material fact, a material force; how you appear -what you say and do, also your MANNER- is a powerful reality. To be a responsible (or a good) actor, you must reckon on the consequences of how you appear; you are responsible not only for your intentions, but for the effects on others of what you say and do. (I am aware of this as a parent and teacher -I try to act with the impact of my appearance in mind: how I appear is often different than how I feel, and in teaching especially, I will say what I do NOT believe for the sake of helping a discussion, I PERFORM because I enact a role; there is a difference between my public face and my private reality.) What makes a “good” or a “bad” performance? This is not a MORAL distinction, but a distinction referring to what Machiavelli calls VIRTU, which means not virtue, but virtuosity. If I reckon on the consequences of my appearance, then I SHAPE them to have the effect I seek -is this to “manipulate” appearances or/and to take responsibility for the effects of my actions? To shape one’s appearances - is this corruption &/or responsibility?

We are inclined to condemn this awareness of the reality of appearances, we are inclined to say - this is IMMORAL, because there is a GAP between who you “really” are and how you act or appear or what you say. But this gap needs to be looked at, and our moral judgments of “actors” needs to be judged, too. Do you imagine that -in the realm of intimate relations- we are supposed to be completely transparent with our friends, lovers, family? But are you wholly transparent or honest with a friend or lover? Are there things you hold back or hide? Little deceptions? Why? -to avoid unnecessary hurt to them? To protect yourself? Because they will not understand what you wish to tell them, not yet at least, maybe later? Have you ever engaged in the act of seduction? Does the other KNOW he or she is being seduced? Why do it? Even in intimate relations, then, there is a “gap” between your inside and your appearance, a degree of artifice or performing? Is the issue how to be a “good” parent, teacher, leader, citizen, lover? Does good mean moral goodness, the same at every instant? Does it mean always being “true” to oneself, whatever that means? Or does it mean virtuosity at a task or role?

In POLITICS, when people are often adversaries and there is NOT a lot of trust, deception may be even more present and necessary. Deception not in a “corrupt” sense, but in the everyday ordinary sense of seducing another, of not saying everything, of withholding some things for the sake of other things which are more important. BUT there are kinds of withholding and degrees of deception, no? Think of (a) CIVILITY, which depends on not expressing how you feel, but showing politeness instead, especially with adversaries; (b) politicians “hiding” their sex life; (c) politicians seeking support from constituencies by downplaying certain of their positions. Or, if you are an atheist in a religious country, should you proclaim it or soft-peddle it? Is it worth being marginalized? (d) Nixon hiding the fact that he was subverting the democratic process (although these deceptions were so compounded that they could not last).
When are political relationships enabled by ordinary degrees of civility and when are they corrupted by systematic lying? When is deception a CRIME threatening the republic, and when a NECESSARY part of politics? When are WE being MORALISTIC about “lying,” and SCAPEGOATING “politicians” for degrees of deception we know in our own lives? What should we make of our wish for complete transparency and authenticity at all times? Is this a wish for PURITY that is nowhere possible—and often destructive—in life? I am trying to suggest the difference between using POLITICAL and MORAL criteria to judge political action. Can we attack political corruption without being moralistic about LIFE?!

Still, what happens when citizens become the passive (duped) audience of a prince—then politics has become “theatricalized” in a bad way? Are we now a cynical audience, who enjoy (and analyze) the artfulness of a performance or technique even at our own expense? But more broadly, if we see politicians as actors, what is the script? Who writes it? Can the script be changed? How?

Machiavelli thus teaches about the REALITY of APPEARANCES, how much appearances matter, but he also EXPOSES the spectacle by which leaders deceive people. What, then, follows from recognizing the INESCAPABLE power of appearances? Is there a difference between “corruption,” and “good theater” or a “good performance”? (A good political performance must (a) show its seams, its artifice? (b) empower and inspire people, who may begin as an audience but are inspired to become actors themselves, authors of their own destiny?

III. Moralism and Fortuna

Americans are moralistic, we make absolute distinctions between good and evil. We do not like moral ambiguity, we think in terms of black and white in more senses than one. Machiavelli appears IMMORAL or AMORAL to us because he sees that good can come from evil deeds, and that evil can come from good intentions. He does not believe that good intentions are all that count in life, and he believes we are responsible for consequences that follow from our speech and action. The terrifying thing is that, since Fortuna governs the world, we cannot guarantee that good will come from our good intentions. We may SAY God is on our side, and then we assume that we are the side of goodness, and never face the truth, which is that any time we act we are at moral risk, because evil may come from what we do, despite our best intentions. To take responsibility for our own complicity in evil, whether by intention or not, is to gain moral maturity. We tend to think that you are either innocent (good) or corrupt, but for Machiavelli, moral maturity requires GETTING OVER innocence, seeing innocence (our need for innocence) as itself immoral.
1. “Of all men who have been eulogized, those deserve it most who have been the authors and founders of religion; next come such as have established republics or kingdoms.” Why/how is the idea of “the founder” so crucial to Machiavelli? Is it a myth? A wish (if there were such people, then ...)? A metaphor for what humans must do? Does he use the myth or become its captive?

2. “There is nothing more difficult to carry out, nor more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to handle than to initiate a new order of things.” Discuss Machiavelli’s idea of innovation: why is it so difficult? Yet why then talk so much of renewal and “return to first principles”?

3. Discuss the concept of Fortuna: Why is Fortuna the goddess of politics? How is a universe ruled by a providential god, or by Fortuna, different? To live in relation to Fortuna is to develop what kind of character? How does it matter that Fortuna is a woman?

4. “Machiavelli portrays a shifting, kaleidoscopic world in which nothing is fixed or certain, no one can be trusted, and things are not what they seem. Appearance is more effectual than reality, and deceit is the best weapon.” Discuss change, appearance, and deceit (and their counterparts, stability, reality, and trust) in the world he portrays. What distinguishes “political” knowledge from other forms of knowledge like science or philosophy?

5. For Machiavelli, politics occurs in a theater of appearances, performance and persuasion. Leaders mold appearances (their words, manner, and deeds) to gain allegiance and inspire action BECAUSE political power depends on belief and loyalty. But what criteria distinguish good and bad performances, good and bad leaders? What do his theatrical metaphors teach about politics?

6. “Because power is inescapable in life, the question is how to generate it and for what ends to exercise it. For Machiavelli, paradoxically, power is lasting only if it is legitimate.” Discuss Machiavelli’s view of power.

7. For Machiavelli, freedom is not “free will” facing a moral choice of right or wrong, but creative action in relation to Fortuna, or as collective action within the framework of a republic. Assess his view of freedom.

8. A. anonymous: “For Machiavelli, freedom means breaking tradition to innovate new routes.”
   B. anonymous: “No! A ‘free people’ depends on a framework of first principles that they renew or make a-new.”

   Relate founding and freedom in Machiavelli

9. Develop Machiavelli’s view of “corruption” and “renewal.” What is corruption? How is it addressed politically? (Is American politics “corrupt” in Machiavelli’s sense? What might his “renewal” look like in the U.S.?)

10. Analyze Machiavelli’s contrast between fighting like beasts (lion and fox, force and fraud) and fighting like men (by laws.) What is the difference? But also, is there a relationship? Or does fighting like beasts as such defeat any democratic end, because means are ends in the making?

11. “Machiavelli’s writings are merely a manual for a political opportunist. He has no conception of the social purpose of politics, and no system
of values: he cannot answer the question of the end for which political power is used. He is a cynical technician of force & fraud.” -A.nonymous

“Machiavelli presents a vision of political virtue to contrast with the incompetence and unnecessary cruelty of the political actors of his day. His vision is meant to inspire and guide citizens (or “armed prophets”) to bring stability and justice to corrupt and violent time.”-B.nonymous

Assess the purpose of Machiavelli’s political theory

12. “For Machiavelli, political responsibility requires learning how not to be good. He thus says “I love my city more than my soul.” His is a moral though not a Christian view of life and politics.” -A.nonymous

“To claim that ends justify means is misguided because means are always ends in the making: force and fraud NEVER create value.” -B.nonymous

Assess how Machiavelli relates morality & politics (Does he endorse politics without morality? Show how political responsibility involves a different kind of morality altogether? Does political responsibility require dealing with violence, or is he mistaken about means and ends?)

13. Machiavelli’s figuration of political corruption as effeminacy, his macho persona and willingness to embrace violence, his idealization of male/paternal leadership, his difficulty in imagining mutuality, and his picture of Fortuna, show the impact of gender codes, and his own sense of proper (and endangered) masculinity. Use gender to assess his theory.

14. What IS the role of ideals in Machiavelli’s view of politics? (One great critic argued that Machiavelli focused “on men, not principles” because ideals are always used to justify horrific conduct.)

15. Analyze Weber’s view of tragedy and politics, including the two ethics (of ultimate ends and of responsibility) and his image of “the demon of politics.” In sum, what distinguishes “politics as a vocation”?

16. Assess Arendt’s claim that political theorists confuse violence and power: why distinguish them? Is her distinction credible? Does it change how you view politics? (You may use her to read Machiavelli: does he teach the distinction? Does his confusion about it explain the problems in his theory? Does he show how the distinction fails?)

17. Among canonical political theorists, only Machiavelli understands how a “space of appearances” constitutes the world of politics. Do we misunderstand the theatrical (and creative but also corrupt) dimension of political life if we deny the gap between reality and appearances? Are we ALL “politicians?” Discuss the idea of appearances and theatricality.

18. Does democracy depend on constitutionalism, or is democracy jeopardized by it? Assess the arguments about democracy and constitutionalism.
Solely Because of the Increasing Disorder

Solely because of the increasing disorder
In our cities of class struggle
Some of us have decided
To speak no more of cities by the sea, snow on roofs, women
The smell of ripe apples in the cellars, the senses of the flesh, all
That makes man round and human
But to speak in the future only about the disorder
And so become one-sided, reduced, enmeshed in the business
Of politics and the dry, indecorous vocabulary
Of dialectical economics
So that this awful cramped coexistence
Of snowfalls (they’re not merely cold, we know)
Exploitation, the lured flesh, class justice, should not engender
Approval of a world so many-sided; delight in
The contradictions of so bloodstained a life
You understand.

-Bertolt Brecht

Questions from a Worker Who Reads

Who built Thebes of the seven gates?
In the books you will find the names of kings.
Did the kings haul up the lumps of rock?
And Babylon, many times demolished
Who raised it up so many times? In what houses
Of gold-glittering Lima did the builders live?
Where, the evening that the Wall of China was finished
Did the masons go? Great Rome
Is full of triumphal arches. Who erected them? Over whom
Did the Caesars triumph? Had Byzantium, much praised in song,
Only palaces for its inhabitants? Even in fabled Atlantis
The night the ocean engulfed it
The drowning still bawled for their slaves.

The young Alexander conquered India.
Was he alone?
Caesar beat the Gauls.
Did he not even have a cook with him?
Phillips of Spain wept when his armada
Went down. Was he the only one to weep?
Frederick the Second won the Seven Years War. Who
Else won it?

Every page a victory.
Who cooked the feast for the victors?
Every ten years a great man.
Who paid the bill?

So many reports.
So many questions.

-Brecht

SECOND PAPER: write 5-page double-spaced paper due Friday November 8 by 5pm

1. Use a text to analyze what political theorists DO. (Consider what they say
about theory and how they “do” it.)

2. Analyze the “rhetoric” of a Marx text. Relate what it claims to how it speaks. Assess how he tries to persuade an audience to think/act differently. How does he claim authority or seek authority in our eyes? How does he use language to gain our assent? Is there an alternative to the form of rhetoric and persuasion he uses?

3. “Social criticism and change depend on creating counter-histories that make room for new actors and voices.” Analyze the role of narrative in Marx: assess the politics entailed by the story a text tells and HOW that story is told.

4. Use a Marx text to assess the claim that we are profoundly shaped by society (conditioned by forces we do not control) and yet also (a) makers of society, and (b) always capable of acting differently.

5. Use a Marx text to analyze the problem of domination: In what ways must a credible political theory address “domination” if it is to foster democratic life and human freedom? But what are the dangers in focusing on domination?

6. In a culture shaped by liberal political thought, freedom means being a "sovereign," self-sufficient and self-determining individual, but Marx depicts the paradox by which human action and freedom in fact depends on recognizing both forces we don’t control and others with whom we are tied. Use one Marx text to analyze this paradoxical idea of freedom.

7. Contrast freedom conceived as: (a) the choice of right or wrong in terms of (god’s) moral law; (b) creative action in relation to Fortuna; (c) collective action within the rules of a game or republic; or (d) “making history” by consciously taking charge of (changing) social structure.

8. Machiavelli depicts a political world ruled by Fortuna, not god, while Marx depicts a political world ruled by laws of history: what difference follows from focusing on contingency or social structure? (Does KM gain a systematic perspective that NM lacks? Does KM avoid dilemmas that NM makes crucial to political virtuosity?)

9. Explore Marx’s idea that liberal capitalist society entails a “double life” split between “bourgeois” and “citizen.” What is the problem? Why not conceive the “state” as “a means” to “private” ends in civil society? Why not lodge freedom in private life and civil society? What is Marx’s problem with what he calls “political emancipation,” and how does he imagine moving beyond it?

10. Explore how Marx’s theory of alienation as a theory of politics.

11. Marx claims that “every class struggle is a political struggle.” What is the meaning of “class” and “political”? Assess this view of politics.

12. What counts as “making history” in Marx’s view, and your own? (Is their “making history” for Machiavelli?)

13. Assess the language of necessity and inevitability in Marx. (Does it preclude freedom, or inspire action? What kind of claim is he making, and what impact does it have?)

14. Assess Marx’s claim that justice means creating circumstances in which “the development of each is a condition of the development of all.”

15. According to Marx’s story in the CM, the proletariat no longer needs teachers or critics because experience compels/enables them to become critics
and rebels themselves. Do you agree that ordinary people are -can be- critical of their assumptions and practices? Why/not? How would he respond to you?

16. In the Manifesto, Marx argues that people will and should identify as members of a class, rather than identify by region, ethnicity, religion, or nation. Class identification will "feel" most credible, and arguably, only political identification as members of a class enables people to change their circumstances in fundamental not incremental ways. Assess these claims.

17. Marx criticizes those he calls "utopian socialists" and uses "utopian" pejoratively, yet he is repeatedly called "utopian" by his critics. What is going on here? (What does he want to avoid? Is there a value to being "utopian" that he should affirm? Do criteria of what is "realistic" need to be assessed more critically? Should human nature be a fixed referent?)

18. Marx claims that capitalism "melts all that is solid" and "profanes all tat is holy." Is he correct that capitalism produces disenchantment of what he calls "illusions?" Does capitalism entail new illusions he did not anticipate? Assess Marx’s story of secularization and disenchantment.

19. "Marx hates politics: his goal is an “end to history” when humanity overcomes the very divisions that make politics necessary.” -Anonymous

"Marx reduces politics to the pursuit of material interests: he simply endorses the rule of the strong.” -Anonymous

"Marx brings politics down to earth; he encourages people to make ‘political’ rather than narrow ‘economic’ claims about the good of the whole, and he celebrates human initiative and collaborative action. How can you say he hates or devalues politics?” -Anonymous

Assess Marx’s view of politics

20. Assess Laclau and Mouffe’s theory of “radical democracy.” Which of Marx’s key assumptions do they abandon, and what new premises do they make?
Third paper: due Friday Dec 10 by 5pm

1. Marx distinguishes science and truth from ideology and illusion, but Foucault’s theory of discourse denies this distinction: discourses are themselves ‘regimes of truth’ to contrast with other discourses not with reality as such. Assess why he rejects the ideology-truth distinction, and the consequences of this move for how we imagine/practice politics. What follows for political practice if we say, not that truth is the antidote to power, and the means to human realization, and not that action should lead from the distortion of ideology to more credible truths about reality, but instead that every truth is a form of power? What is the meaning for politics of seeing how human life is constituted within discourses that cannot readily be compared by a criteria of true/false, because each produces its own forms of evidence and verification? What follows from emphasizing their productivity rather than their absolute truth? Is he caught in a performative contradiction? Has he provoked you to think differently about truth?) In sum: explore the relation of truth and politics: If politics is not about replacing illusions with truth, what is it about? Is he close to Machiavelli?

2. For Foucault, power is not ‘juridical,’ neither possessed by a coercive state nor a property of persons bearing rights against it, as liberalism argues. It is not one group ruling another, nor does it emanate from a domain (‘the economy’) to determine other domains, as Marxism argues. F depicts power as ‘disciplinary,’ tied to language, circulating through each and all of us, ‘productive’ of new kinds of subjectivities and practices, and always engendering resistance. Assess this view of power and consider how it changes your view of politics. (Use examples to ask: Has he simply rejected the other views? Revealed what they occluded from view? Plotted a historical change in social life? Does this idea ‘politicize’ regions of life once deemed merely personal or private? In what then does “politics” consist?)

3. For Foucault, modern discourses constitute self-regulating subjects by way of subjection to ascribed identities: we conceive ‘authentic’ identity by taking on the ‘truth’ of our sexed or gendered or raced ‘nature.’) He thus says we must not “discover who we are, but refuse who we are.” Assess his view of identity, subjection and resistance. (How is a ‘subject’ related to our idea of a ‘self’? He rejects the ‘essentialism’ that uses categories to depict the truth of femininity or masculinity, of what ‘black’ means, or of same-sex attraction, so that one’s truth in these terms becomes the basis of identity, and politics means expressing, and getting others to recognize, the truth of one’s identity. To imagine an alternative, compare discourses stipulating identity as homosexual/heterosexual, then gay/straight, now queer/normal. What do such shifts in categories suggest about (the politics of) gender or race?

4. Foucault depicts the language of (sexual) liberation (from repression or oppression) as a ruse of power. Denying there is any escape from relations of power, but casting power as productive rather than repressive, he seeks not a liberation from alienation to self-actualization, but ongoing resistance to ‘discourses’ that define who can speak and what can be said, and to practices of discipline as ‘normalization.’ Why is “liberation” a trap? What politics follows from this claim? What action does it enable/disable?

5. Foucault imagines politics not as governance of the whole, not as citizens (or workers) together exercising power over their collective life as a whole, not as the pursuit of liberation from oppression by collective action, but as people organizing locally and non-nationally to resist disciplinary regimes of power/knowledge in all aspects of their lives. Assess his theory of politics -what is gained and lost by shifting politics away from the state and from claims about a common good, by turning toward local and specific practices of resistance and re-signification?

6. Use Foucault to assess Wolin’s claim that “democracy” cannot be a form of government, but only an episodic form of insurgency against inevitable institutionalization. Has Wolin (and Foucault) given up too much?

7. Analyze the political and theoretical significance of the shift from Rich’s analysis of gender to Butler’s. What is the difference and how does it matter? In turn, assess Zerilli’s critique of Butler. How can “feminism” entail different visions of “politics?”

8. Marx distinguishes ideology from truth, and organizes politics by moving people from one to the other. Butler denies any “truth” to gender; she imagines politics not as making (class or gender) identity correspond to an underlying essence or truth, but as ‘dis-identification’ from ascribed identity. What is the political
meaning of this difference?

9. Analyze what political theorists DO. (Consider what they say about theory and how they “do” it.)

10. “Social change depend on creating counter-histories that make room for new actors and voices.” Analyze the role of narrative: assess the politics entailed both by what story a theorist tells and by how s/he tells it.

11. A central political issue is who people identify with, and on what basis. Use a text to assess political identification as a “we” -and antagonism with a “they.” Is it inescapable, necessary, valuable? a symptom of disavowal or form of exclusion that is at once unwarranted and dangerous?

12. Contrast freedom conceived as: (a) the choice of good or evil in terms of god's moral law; (b) creative 'action in concert'; c) collective action within the rules of a game or republic; (d) “making history” by consciously taking charge of (changing) social structure; (e) “testing” the norms or re-signifying the categories that constitute subjects.

13. Analyze the “rhetoric” of a text. Relate what it claims to how it speaks. Assess how it works to persuade an audience to think/act differently. How does a theorist claim (and seek) authority? How does s/he use language to gain assent from audiences invested in the views/identity s/he would change?

14. For many (white) Americans, American society is conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are equal; for Baldwin, American society is conceived in slavery and dedicated to the proposition that black people are created unequal. Explore the stakes in this disagreement: What differences follow from narrating history by each perspective? Can/must both perspectives be recognized?

15. For Baldwin the real problem in (American) politics is not only domination (of white over black) but white disavowal of collective responsibility for (and benefit from) this systemic inequality. If the problem is not ignorance, but denial of what at some level they know, the solution is not information or a new truth, but acknowledging what they know but won’t fully own or act on. Assess Baldwin’s idea of willful ‘innocence’ and explore how (or if) people can be persuaded - compelled?- to acknowledge what and who they disavow. Does Baldwin perform that feat? How? How not?

16. Race teaches Baldwin that politics must be understood through the process of projection whereby people invest in others their own disclaimed humanity. ‘We are not like those people, with those attributes, who must be excluded or reformed.’ How does he explain this process? How does it work in politics? How does he address it? While Marx invokes interests, Baldwin analyzes motives (like fear and anxiety as well as wishes and fantasies) by using an implicitly psychoanalytic discourse. How does this change your view of politics?

17. Baldwin insists that whites are denying the truth -or true meaning- of their history, and as a result, they display how the past is not dead or past, but alive, ruling the present. The political task, then, is to ‘force’ them to ‘accept’ its formative power, for only by this acknowledgment can they open a space for acting otherwise than the past seems to dictate. Assess how Baldwin conceives (the truth of) history in relation to human freedom.

18. Baldwin depicts ‘love’ as a form of power, and an (even confrontational) engagement with one’s other, neighbor, fellow-citizen. Why is struggle with ones
oppressor a form of love? Is this idea an escape from political life, or a way to imagine and revivify it? **Assess Baldwin’s idea of love, and its link to politics**

19. Does Baldwin bear witness to a truth we deny at great cost, while Foucault denies that there are any such truths? Or, do both make visible experiences, people, and possibilities rendered invisible by monopolistic interpretive frameworks? **Compare Baldwin and Foucault.**

20. Because we inherit not ‘the’ past but stories representing it, Baldwin suggests that democracy must multiply perspectives or voices that narrate the past. Yet he also says, we must face what we have ‘forgotten’ in the past, or we remain imprisoned by it. **What is his politics of narration & history?**

21. “Because reality is not self-evident, interpretation is crucial in politics; positioned differently in society, we disagree about reality and justice. Citizens in a democracy must use persuasion to advance perspectives each sees as partial and contestable.” A.nonymous

   “But domination and inequality are truths we deny at our peril. Don’t some people see rightly, while others are blind? Every perspective or story is NOT valid!” B.nymous

**Use one or two texts to enter this debate about truth.**